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The hair dresser slid the last silver pin into Nosa’s hair. Then she began to adjust the curls and stray strands of hair on the head of the bride. Nosa yawned. How much longer was this going to take? Bisi, the hair dresser, had been prepping Nosa’s hair for more than two hours now. Nosa had been looking anxiously at the clock the whole time, wondering over and over again, just how long it would be before she would be done. For until Bisi was done, Nosa could not see the finished work. Such was their agreement when Nosa had selected Bisi to be the official hairstylist for the D-day. Nosa tapped her feet impatiently.

“Auntie, I have finished,” Bisi announced triumphantly, simultaneously spinning the chair around to face the mirror.

Nosa stared at her reflection in the mirror. She almost did not recognize herself, with the makeover Bisi had accomplished. Her hair was swept to the right, with large curls dominating the right side of her head. Some of them fell forward on that side of her face too, held in place by tiny bobbin pins carefully hidden away in her hair by Bisi’s skillful hands. Four decorative silver pins were placed strategically on the left side of her hair to provide visual balance. She looked stunning.

“Ohhh! Bisi, you out-did yourself! In fact, I will have to pay you extra for doing such a fantastic job!” Nosa chirped happily, admiring herself in the mirror.

Bisi just nodded and smiled in response. She had been doing this – styling brides for their weddings – for three years. If there was anything she had learnt, it was never to take any promises made by the bride, seriously, on the day of her wedding. Sticking to the contract price and terms was the best thing to do, and even that had its challenges. Often times, brides would receive services and abscond without paying Bisi’s balance. Those were some of the fall-outs of doing business involving highly emotional events like weddings. But, she would not have it any other way.

“Thank God you like it, Auntie. What about your makeup?”

Nosa turned to Mercy, her best friend and maid of honor. Mercy was also the only member of the bridal train, at Nosa's insistence. “Oya, Mercy come and prettify me,” she said snapping her fingers. Mercy obeyed, and as she was applying Nosa’s makeup, she joked about how ‘prettify’ was another word that Nosa had made up. Nosa made her stop what she was doing and asked her to fetch her old dictionary, which was gathering dust with a stack of books in a corner of her bedroom. After retrieving it, she confirmed, to Mercy’s surprise, that ‘prettify’ was actually a word that existed in the English language. Mercy hissed, mumbled something about Nosa being a show-off, and continued with her makeup application. Nosa chuckled and allowed her eyes to wander around the room.

Her eyes settled on the picture of a man in his early thirties taped to the mirror. All over the room, in fact, lay pictures of Nosa and this man, transforming the room into a shrine of sorts. But this particular picture, the one where Osaze stood in a relaxed pose with his hands in jeans pockets, wearing a white muscled shirt, was the one she treasured the most. It was the picture he had given to her on the day they met. And every time she looked at it, she re-played that scene in her mind.

Love never tells us when it will come. It just happens and lovers can either fight it or embrace it. Nosa and Osaze chose to embrace love. You see, before meeting Osaze, Nosa had been in a string of bad relationships. Really, really bad relationships. In fact, the last guy she
dated before Osaze came into the picture was a real piece of work. He delighted in using his 
girlfriends as punching bags, and his philosophy was clear: boxing women was a dying sport, 
and he was the Messiah who was sent to revive it. Nosa was not spared, and for three months 
she suffered at the hands of this rogue. During that time, she found creative excuses to explain 
away the bruises and black eyes ‘Sir Box-a-Lot’ had used to decorate her body. It was only 
when this guy actually graduated from the university that their relationship ended, and Nosa was 
free to date again. By the time Osaze entered the picture, he had a lot of ‘clean-up’ work to do, 
as Nosa was understandably still healing from the previous relationship.

Nosa was a 21 year old student, in her third year at the University of Lagos, studying 
English. Osaze was a postgraduate student, working towards his Master’s degree in 
Architecture. He was 28 years old, when they met. That Thursday morning, her 10 a.m. lecture 
had been cancelled because the lecturer had not returned from an out-of-town conference he had 
attended the day before. Of course, the students did not find this out until they showed up for the 
lecture. Not that they complained, either.

As Nosa still had another lecture in the same building at 12 noon, she knew that going back 
to her room was out of the question. At Mercy’s suggestion – yes, the same Mercy who was 
applying Nosa’s makeup – they decided to go to one of the numerous campus photographers to 
take some pictures. In fact, Mercy proposed that they take what students popularly referred to as 
a ‘motion picture.’ It consisted of the subject walking slowly and deliberately towards the 
photographer, who worked ardently to capture the subject ‘in-motion.’ After settling on one 
photographer and explaining what they wanted, he took a few shots, and they headed back to his 
photography stand under a tree. It was under this tree that Nosa stood, with Mercy looking over 
her shoulder, at a portfolio of the photographer’s work, when they both spotted a picture of a 
rather attractive young man. The photographer looked amused as the girls speculated about the 
age of the stranger in the picture. Nosa had guessed at 25, while Mercy was convinced that he 
was at least 27. They were so engrossed in their argument, that they did not notice a tall dark 
figure walk up to the tree. He stood watching the girls without saying a word, waiting for a lull 
in the conversation. When the opportunity came, he cleared his throat and announced:

“Ladies, there’s no need to argue. I am 28.”

Whether it was the shock of seeing the person in the picture standing before them in the 
flesh, or whether they had thought he was a spirit, no one knows. Nosa and Mercy just stood 
there staring at him wide-eyed, mouths open. The stranger laughed at them. He joked with the 
photographer about how pretty young women should not leave their mouths open for flies. 
Mercy was still tongue-tied, but it was Nosa who began to apologize, until she realized she didn’t 
know what exactly she was sorry about. The stranger extended his hand first to Nosa, and then 
to Mercy, introducing himself as Osaze Felix Idehen.

Each name rolled off his tongue with the palpable ease that exudes from a man who 
understands the meaning of his name. It was like he had been rehearsing for that moment, all his 
life. If Nosa did not know better, she would have assumed that he had christened his own self at 
his naming ceremony. It was this confidence with which he announced his name that first struck 
her. Not only was it unusual for a person to introduce himself using his full name, but Osaze 
spoke with the air of a man who knew his own mind. And Nosa was at a point in her life when 
she was just beginning to discover who she really was.

They became friends from that moment onwards. Osaze who had come to pay for and 
collect the picture the girls had been gawking at, decided to hand it over to Nosa. He wrote his 
ECONET cellphone number on the back of the picture, but promised to call her himself. He did.
By the time Nosa returned to class for her 12 noon lecture, her phone's address book held a new entry: the name and number of the man who would steal her heart away. And that was how their 3-year relationship started.

Nosa's best features, according to Osaze, were her eyes. He would always lovingly refer to them as “the eyes of a goddess.” That Osaze treasured Nosa was an understatement, and no poem he ever wrote was complete without a tribute to her almond-shaped eyes. He was every bit a romantic, and took every opportunity to show it. Even when Nosa was completing her NYSC in Kaduna, Osaze visited her often, taking time off from work at an architecture firm to spend weekends with her. It was on one of those visits that Nosa had announced that she was pregnant. That was six months ago.

She slid her hand across her belly, and closed her eyes as Mercy continued working on her face. It was time for the eye shadow, liner and mascara. Nosa’s thoughts drifted away again. She vividly remembered Osaze’s reaction to the news that she was carrying their child. He was ecstatic. She had been very worried beforehand that he would deny responsibility for the pregnancy. So, in her nervousness, and in a bid to prepare him for the heavy news, she had devised a plan: she would take some of the money he regularly gave her for her upkeep, and prepare his favorite dish: pounded yam and egusi soup, complete with bush meat. She was still undecided as to whether to break the news to him while he was eating or after he had devoured the meal. However, when visions of Osaze choking on a piece of bush meat assailed her mind, she decided to wait until he was done with his food before breaking the news to him, gently. But, as it turned out, all her precautions were unnecessary.

“Osaze, I am pregnant. About three weeks far gone. The doctor confirmed it two days ago when …”

He did not even allow her finish her sentence. He had jumped up in joy and swept her up in a warm embrace, and then announced that they would have to get married before the baby arrived. So, there was never a formal proposal, but he had unceremoniously given her an engagement ring the following week, on her birthday. And with the informal engagement, came the need to inform the two families of their decision.

In all the years they had dated, Nosa had never met Osaze's parents. It wasn’t like she had not tried to meet them, but Osaze was always giving her excuses. They did not sound like excuses at the time, but in retrospect, she reasoned that that was what they were. The first time she had asked, he had said that his parents had travelled out of the country on vacation. Nosa was in her final year at the university then, and amidst the work and stress that came with that, she had not remembered to ask to meet them after their 'supposed' return from their trip. And Osaze had not brought up the issue again.

After graduation, while waiting to be posted to her place of primary assignment, one of the requirements of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), she had asked to meet his parents again. This time, Osaze offered another plausible excuse: his parents, who lived outside Lagos, were visiting close family friends in Enugu. Apparently, these long-standing friends of the Idehen family had a daughter who had just given birth to twins after 5 years of barrenness. It was this daughter that Osaze's parents had gone to visit as well as her parents. Nosa remembered that she had even said a little prayer for journey mercies from Enugu back to his parents' home base in Benin City. But she still had not met them, and had not seen pictures of them either. Osaze had told her that he had left pictures of his parents and siblings - Osaze was the eldest child - at their family home in Benin. And Nosa, of course, believed him.
However, with a wedding now looming on the horizon, Nosa knew that she had to meet Osaze's parents before the D-day, and she looked forward to it. They picked a date, approximately two weeks after the pregnancy announcement, to go and visit his parents. Nosa who had never been to Benin, even though her parents told her that was where she was born, was excited to be killing two birds with one stone: visit the city of her birth, and meet her sweetheart's parents, and relatives. The day they had picked was a Saturday, and Osaze had decided to drive them down to his parents' house himself. The trip took several hours, and Nosa had drifted in and out of sleep, not knowing where they were half of the time. At a point, Osaze announced that they were in Benin City, but then added a new update: he claimed that one of his younger sisters had called him to tell him that his parents had temporarily moved from Benin City to a 'small town' outside Benin, but still in Edo State. So, there was a minor change of plans, as Osaze put it, warranting the need to change their destination to this other small town instead. The whole thing did not make any sense to Nosa, but she had accepted it, reasoning that at the very least, before the day was over, she would have met his parents.

It was almost nightfall, when they reached a small village about one hour outside Benin City. Ordinarily, the trip from Benin to the village should have taken just 15 minutes or so, but the combination of bad roads and unfavorable weather - it was raining heavily - made the journey longer and more arduous. Nosa had woken up from her umpteenth nap in the car, to see that they had pulled up to a small hut in this village. The sight of the brown thatched roof hut set against the orange glow of the sky sent chills down her spine; it looked eerie. But that was not all. Osaze led a very shocked and confused Nosa into the hut to meet his parents, who he had claimed were retired University lecturers. The two people who stood before her looked like they had never seen the inside of a classroom in their lives. Mr. Idehen wore a tattered and torn singlet with an old wrapper loosely hanging on his waist. Mrs. Idehen was similarly attired, except that she wore an old blue cotton blouse, and her wrapper looked like whatever color it once had was now lost to many buckets of water. If Nosa had to take a quick guess, she would have said that they were both farmers. But she was not thinking at that point. In fact, during the entire visit, she had been very quiet. How could she tell her parents, who ran an advertising agency, and lived in Ikoyi, that this was the family of the man she was about to marry? She decided she wouldn’t. After all, they lived outside Lagos, and she would barely see them after the wedding. If ever. These were the thoughts on her mind as they made their way back to Lagos the next day, after spending the previous night in a small motel in Benin.

By the time they returned to Lagos, Nosa had fabricated the perfect story to tell her parents when they asked about the visit: she gave them the version of Osaze's story about his parents that he had always told her, i.e. that they were retired lecturers who lived in Benin City. And that everything was as she had expected it to be. However, she added that they had fallen on hard times, knowing that her parents would question the financial state of his family. Osaze had never tried to explain the state in which she met his parents. Or why everything he had told her about them was contrary to what she observed. And Nosa had not asked. She was carrying Osaze's child, and was only too grateful that he was going to marry her. As far as she was concerned, this minor detail about his parents was something she was prepared to live with. All she told Osaze when they got back to Lagos, was that she was not going to go through the rigors of a traditional marriage. Furthermore, her parents would only meet his parents on the day of the wedding. She knew that she could convince her parents on the latter point. She was the only child after all, and whatever she demanded, they would comply with. But first, Osaze had to meet Nosa's parents.
From the moment Osaze walked into the Osagie household, Mrs. Osagie, Nosa's mother did not like him. And she made it clear. Mr. Osagie had gotten along fine with Osaze, asking questions on politics, which Osaze answered eagerly and intelligently. But, Mrs. Osagie had been very quiet during the visit. And after Osaze left, she told Nosa and her father why. She said that Osaze had a bad aura around him, and that her spirit did not agree with him. She also said something else that Nosa would never forget: that Osaze's eyes twitched anytime he spoke, and that he was too quick to answer questions. In Mrs. Osagie's mind, those were the tell-tale signs of a man who could not keep his word.

Nosa had burst into tears at her mother's words, accusing her of trying to destroy her happiness using irrational excuses. As she wiped her tear-stained face with the back of her hands, she had said emphatically to her mother:

"I will marry Osaze, whether you like it or not. I am carrying his child."

Ordinarily, Mrs. Osagie would have dealt Nosa a heavy slap for her rudeness, and also for what she termed 'family disgrace,' but Nosa's delicate state prevented that. She had reluctantly agreed to the wedding, silently praying that everything would go well for her only child. After this initial disagreement, the wedding plans had gone along without a hitch. That is, until the following month, when Nosa was two months pregnant.

She kept having the same dream three nights in a row. In her dream, she saw herself sitting at a table, spread with all kinds of delicacies. Before sitting down to eat, she would look down and see her feet clad with beautiful shoes. As soon as she sat down to eat, a heavy wind would blow all the food away, leaving the table empty. At the end of the dream, she would be barefooted. The beautiful shoes were gone.

At first, she had thought the dreams were a side effect of the pregnancy, and dismissed them casually. However, by the third dream, she was alarmed and rushed to tell her mother about it. The moment she opened her mouth and started telling her mother about the dream, she began to feel sharp pains in her belly. The pain intensified, and before she knew it, she was on the floor, clutching her belly and writhing in pain. Mrs. Osagie rushed Nosa, who was unconscious by that time, to the hospital. By the time Nosa opened her eyes, a man in a white coat informed her that she had lost the pregnancy. The wedding was now a few months away.

But the story did not end there. Nosa had expected that after losing the baby, Osaze would no longer marry her. So, she was very surprised when he insisted on proceeding with the wedding arrangements. In fact, Osaze was even more supportive after the miscarriage, than when Nosa was still pregnant. She thanked God over and over again for giving her such a faithful, supportive, caring and loving man. It was this man that she would be happy to call her husband in just a few hours.

Nosa rubbed her belly again, and opened her eyes. Mercy had finished applying her makeup, and began to help Nosa into the white gown she would wear to say 'I do' to Osaze. They had spoken on the phone the night before, saying sweet nothings to each other. However, when Nosa had tried calling him again that morning, network issues had barred any further phone conversations. So, they had resorted to texting each other back and forth. The last text Nosa had sent had said something along the lines of how she couldn’t wait to spend the rest of her life with Osaze. And she expected a reply, so she kept checking her phone.

Mercy was making a joke about how the church would be full of people wearing different shades of pink and silver, even though Nosa had made it clear that 'baby pink' and 'light silver' were the precise shades of colors guests were to wear. As Nosa watched her mother pencil in her eyebrows, Mercy had whispered in Nosa's ear that she was certain that the eyebrow fairy would
have plucked enough eyebrows from some women, and re-distributed an abundance of eyebrows on the faces of other women. Nosa laughed as she pictured the church, a mix of pink and silver, with women gorgeously attired, head ties expertly tied, and men craning their necks to look over the head ties at the stage in front of them.

Just then, Nosa's cell phone buzzed. Osaze had sent her a text and her heart raced as she unlocked her phone and read it expectantly:

"Nosa, since you cannot retain a child for three months, I have found someone who can. Agnes is four months pregnant for me, and she is the one I will be spending the rest of my life with. I won't be waiting for you at the altar."

Nosa began laughing wildly waving her phone in the air. At first, nobody understood what was happening until she started pulling out the silver pins one by one. Then, she began to rip her wedding dress apart violently. That was when Mr. Osagie heard his wife's voice rise into a high-pitched scream, a sound he had never heard before. She was screaming and crying bitterly, that her enemies had struck her only child. And as soon as he entered Nosa's bedroom, and looked into his daughter's eyes, he knew that there would be no wedding. Nosa had lost her mind.

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About the Author

Sharon Abimbola Salu was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria where she lived until she relocated to the United States of America. Her stories are mostly set in Nigeria, and she writes the kind of stories she would like to read. A professed lover of spicy foods, she loves experimenting with new recipes, to the dismay of non-spicy food lovers. Apart from writing, photography is her other hobby.

To learn more, you can visit her blog at http://sharonsalu.wordpress.com

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